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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/10/2020
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO ANBAR

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher R. Hill for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During the Ambassador's trip to Anbar province on February 9, provincial government leaders and tribal sheikhs implored him to "intervene" more directly against perceived Iranian domination of the GOI. They envisioned Anbar as the key to a prosperous, stable, and united Iraq that enjoyed strong relations with the United States. At the same time, they worried that Iranian meddling would preclude free and fair elections and deny Sunnis a place in Iraq's political future. The Ambassador assured the Anbaris of continued U.S. engagement, including support for national elections, and contrasted America's vision of a strong and internationally engaged Iraq with Iran's preference for a weak and isolated client state, divided along sectarian lines. END SUMMARY.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT LEADERS URGE U.S. INTERVENTION

2.(C) In a morning meeting with Anbar's provincial leadership, Acting Governor Fuad al-Karbuli acknowledged the province's ongoing security challenges to the Ambassador, but lauded his colleagues' cooperation in reconstituting the army and police. He was optimistic that Anbari leaders would be successful in defeating terrorist threats. (Note: Terrorists have targeted Anbar's Provincial Government Center multiple times in the last several months, most recently in a Dec. 30, 2009 incident that killed a Provincial Council member and security guard and seriously wounded Governor Qasim al-Fahadawi. End Note.) Karbuli highlighted Provincial Council (PC) members' support for upcoming parliamentary elections, and advocated investment and economic development in Anbar as a means to thwart terrorists' appeal and reduce dependence on the central government.

3.(C) Continuing Karbuli's point, PC Chairman Dr. Jasim al-Halbusi praised the "victory" against terrorism in Anbar, but said that "to consolidate you must offer people something." The government in Baghdad provided Anbar with an annual budget of USD \$112 million, he said, yet the province carried a debt of USD \$60 million. He noted that some Anbaris still had only two to four hours of electricity per day, and that despite previous USG assistance the province continued to suffer deficiencies in education, agriculture, and basic infrastructure (notably the sewage system, which he commented was "poisoning" the Euphrates River). High unemployment exacerbated the situation. This was despite Anbar's vast resources and potential: "We have everything from sand to uranium, sixty percent of Iraq's water, millions of acres of agricultural land." Halbusi condemned the "failure of leadership" in Baghdad that led to the squandering of "billions" of dollars, especially in oil resources. He asserted that the United States had an obligation to those Americans and Iraqis who died as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq to intervene with national authorities and create effective leadership in Baghdad.

4.(C) On de-Ba'athification, Deputy Governor Hikmat al-Mohamdi said his name was on the Accountability and Justice Commission's (AJC) disqualification list even though he had participated in the December 2005 national elections and had gained the trust of the PC. He said the "sole choice" that remained for the United States was to force a review of the AJC's work so that innocent Iraqis could run for office. (Note: Hikmat told us he had appealed his inclusion on the de-Ba'athification list to the Cassation Chamber. End Note.)

SECURITY OFFICIALS CONFIDENT AHEAD OF NATIONAL ELECTIONS

5.(C) On the security front, Iraqi Army Major General Abullah al-Jaburi (who chairs the weekly Anbar Operations Center meeting to coordinate security matters) said the army gained substantive experience on elections security in 2005 and was capable of ensuring security for the upcoming contest. He stated that Anbaris trusted the security forces and "don't want to return to square one. We'll defy the terrorists." Interim Provincial Chief of Police Major General Baha al-Karkhi said that although the police force had been formed in tough circumstances and "in a hurry," it was performing well. He called for a more professional police force but claimed that the "questionable links" (i.e., ties to Iran) of Interior Minister Jawwad Bolani hampered that goal. (Note: PM Maliki appointed Karkhi as interim provincial police chief after the PC fired Chief Tariq Abdullah. Karkhi's criticism of Bolani thus likely reflects his loyalty to Maliki. End Note.)
SHEIKHS CALL FOR MORE U.S. INTERVENTION

6.(C) Clad in traditional garb, eight tribal sheikhs filtered into Camp Ramadi for an afternoon session with the Ambassador. With speech rich in proverb and allegory, each spoke in turn to express disappointment with the national government in Baghdad and concern about Iranian interference in Iraq. All believed that the United States was not intervening actively enough to address the problems they thought were brought on by the U.S. invasion. "If you build a new house, it must be better than the old one," exclaimed Sheikh Mohammed al-Ilyawi, "But we don't like the new house! The Shi'a are spoiled and don't let anyone in." Sheikh Abdullah al-Faraj worried that "the situation is tense and might result in a civil war." Sheikh Ilyawi added: "You are the father of Iraq (Abu Iraq)! You created the problems here and we call on you and the U.S. Embassy to take your rightful role in fixing them."

7.(C) The sheikhs worried about the effects of the de-Ba'athification campaign, especially in their majority-Sunni province. "Seventy-five percent of Iraqis were Ba'athists," noted Sheikh Hatim al-Nimrawi. "We spent 35 years under that regime." Despite their distaste for the prevailing political situation, the sheikhs affirmed their support for the electoral process and a long-term partnership with the United States. "The mistake of the boycott (of 2005) will not be repeated. We got the word out to everyone to vote and have been doing this for the past several months," said Sheikh Sa'ad al-Aethawi. The sheikhs requested a U.S. consulate for Ramadi and U.S. assistance to build a provincial airport.

18. (C) COMMENT: Allegations of malign and widespread Iranian interference in Iraqi affairs are a common refrain in Anbar, whose residents often feel isolated from and ignored by Baghdad. Accustomed to patiently hearing complaints and requests for assistance from their members, the tribal sheikhs reversed roles in their meeting with the Ambassador, reflecting their belief that the United States still remains the ultimate arbiter in Iraqi politics. END COMMENT.
HILL